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Evaluation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

As his immediate office, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General plays a critical role in supporting the Secretary-General's substantive and administrative functions and his executive direction of the Organization. The unique cross-pillar perspective and unparalleled convening power of the Executive Office within the Organization enable the Secretary-General to respond swiftly and effectively to developments and to initiate action on a wide range of issues that cut across the international peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian domains.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Office and the relevance of its activities in supporting the leadership role of the Secretary-General and, through him, the United Nations system and Member States. Mixed methods were employed in the evaluation, including interviews and surveys of the Executive Office staff and key stakeholders, extensive document and data review and direct observation.

In the period under review, direct support provided by the Executive Office to the Secretary-General has been generally effective and included correspondence handling, scheduling and trip planning, production and review of briefing notes and talking points, speechwriting and communications. It has allowed the Secretary-General to respond promptly to scheduling requests, remain well-informed, attend meetings well prepared and release press statements quickly. However, there have been some efficiency costs in relation to inadequate prioritization of the Secretary-General's schedule, as well as burdensome and disruptive travel arrangements, in particular the "trip captain" system.

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In addition, the intense workload required for the office to be responsive has negatively impacted on the time available for critical reflection and planning and dedicated capacity for holistic medium and long-term policy planning has been insufficient. Although some longer-term planning capacity has emerged in parts of the office, high-level, cross-sector and longer-term planning has been a key gap — an assessment also shared by the Executive Office staff and stakeholders.

The Executive Office has supported the Secretary-General well on decision-making, although the nature of that support has changed in order to correspond to a decreased reliance on formal collective decision-making processes. Decisions have increasingly been made in smaller, ad hoc meetings, which has allowed for a nimbler response to crises but has also had a negative impact on consultation and buy-in. Illustrating this shift was the changed nature of senior management meetings in recent years, two thirds of which were primarily for information sharing purposes.

Shifts and overlaps between the responsibilities of the Deputy Secretary-General and the Chef de Cabinet have led to risks for the functioning of the Executive Office. A shift in roles in 2012 consolidated the substantive pillars under the Deputy Secretary-General. This led, however, to some overlap in political functions with the Secretary-General and the Chef de Cabinet, who is the point of contact for Member States. It also left some gaps in interdepartmental arbitration — a role better suited to the more senior position of Deputy Secretary-General.

Placement of the Secretary-General's special initiatives in the Executive Office has helped to spur action on key priorities, such as addressing climate change and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, such arrangements have also led to concerns about duplication between the office and other parts of the United Nations system, particularly in development sectors.

Finally, the Executive Office has benefited from high-calibre and hard-working staff who have understood and serviced the Secretary-General's priorities well but faced challenges in information sharing and cross-pillar collaboration within the Office. Its expanded size and the lack of opportunity for working across units has created a sense among some staff of a "siloed" office.

In November 2016, OIOS presented preliminary findings to the transition team of the Secretary-General, which has already taken steps to address some of the issues identified in the present report. These include:

- The formation of an Executive Committee for senior-level decision-making
- The establishment of two new senior positions: the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination and the Senior Adviser on Policy
- The reversion of the functions of the Deputy Secretary-General to those set out in General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

In the light of these and other actions taken by the current Secretary-General which address the main results of this evaluation, OIOS makes no further recommendations at present.

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken by OIOS to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of the Executive Office for consideration at its fifty-seventh session in June 2017 (A/70/16, para. 108), which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244, 59/272, as well as in ST/SGB/273, which authorize OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. The general frame of reference for OIOS evaluation is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.[1]

3. In this context, the overall evaluation objective was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Office and the relevance of its activities in supporting the leadership role of the Secretary-General and, through him, the United Nations System and Member States. The topic emerged from a scoping phase described in the evaluation inception paper.[2] The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. Owing to the timing of the present report, a preliminary version of the evaluation results was presented to the transition team of the Secretary-General designate in November 2016. The new administration has since then taken steps to address some of the issues conveyed in the present report.

II. Background

Mandate

5. Established in 1946, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General was created to provide the administrative services necessary to assist the Secretary-General in his relationships with members, and to assist him in coordinating the activities of the departments of the Secretariat affecting such relationships.[3] It was mandated to assist the Secretary-General with performing the following two general roles:[4]

[1] See ST/SGB/2016/68, p. 16, regulation 7.1: (a) to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives; (b) to enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives.

[2] IED-16-007, Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division Inception Paper: Programme Evaluation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, 17 June 2016.

[3] First report of the Advisory Group of Experts on Administrative Personnel and Budgetary Questions to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Provisional Organization Plan for the Secretariat (1946).

[4] See A/70/6 (Sect. 1) and ST/SGB/1998/18.

- **Chief Administrative Officer role**.[5] The Executive Office assists with: strategic planning; the establishment of general policy; the exercise of executive direction, coordination and supervision in relation to the work of the Organization; scheduling; travel; human resources; finance; and general administration.

- **Substantive role**.[6] The Executive Office assists with the Secretary-General's relations with the principal organs of the Organization, including helping to carry out the wide-ranging tasks that they assign to the Secretary-General; his or her liaison and contacts with Governments, delegations of Member States, the press, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the public; and with preparing related reports, briefings, speeches and statements.

6. Given the relationship between the Executive Office and the role of the Secretary-General, the way in which the incumbent chooses to carry out his role significantly affects the way in which the Executive Office carries out its own functions in support of the Secretary-General.

7. The principal client of the Executive Office is the Secretary-General. Other key stakeholders with whom the Executive Office liaises include: Member States; delegations; Secretariat departments and United Nations funds, programmes and agencies; peace operations and country teams in the field; the media; non-governmental organizations and civil society; and the public.

8. As his immediate office, the Executive Office provides vital support to the Secretary-General and his strategic objectives and to his executive direction of the Organization. The Executive Office has a unique cross-pillar perspective and convening power within the Organization. These are essential for pulling the system together to produce coherent cross-sector analyses, identify holistic policy options, and galvanize coordinated action. The Executive Office plays a key role in the Secretary-General's ability to anticipate crises, respond swiftly and effectively to developments and to initiate action across a wide range of issues that cut across the international peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian domains.

Structure and leadership

9. According to ST/SGB/1998/18, the Executive Office is headed by the Chef de Cabinet, at the Under-Secretary-General level. In 1998, the General Assembly also established the post of Deputy Secretary-General as an integral part of the Office of the Secretary-General.[7]

10. The reporting lines between the Deputy Secretary-General and the Chef de Cabinet have varied over time. While between 1998 and 2003 the Chef de Cabinet

[5] Article 97 of the United Nations Charter and the Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations (1945-1946, San Francisco and London).

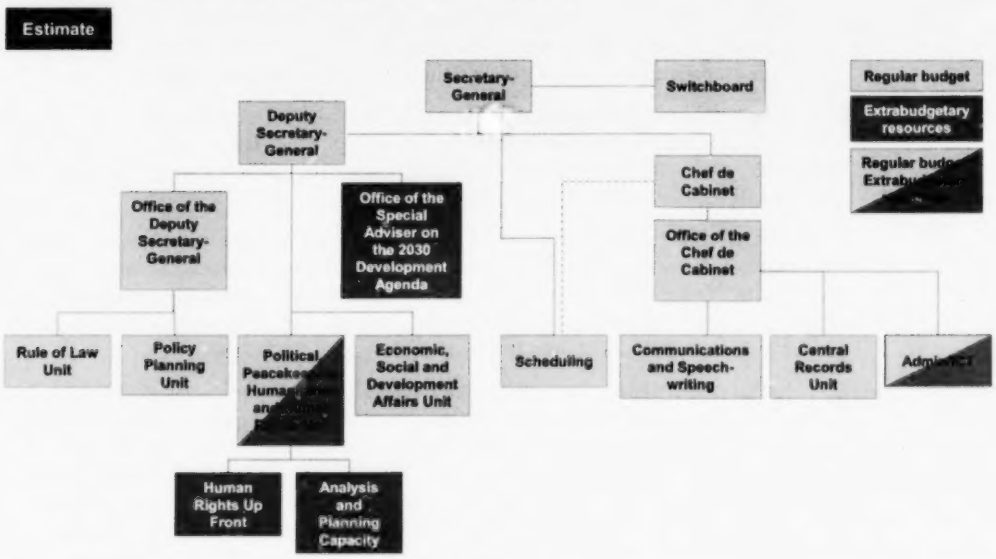
[6] Within his sphere of competence, pursuant to Articles 12, 20, 98 and 99 of the United Nations Charter and the report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations, and including requests by principal organs of the United Nations.

[7] See General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

formally reported through the Deputy Secretary-General to the Secretary-General, since 2003 both have reported directly to the Secretary-General.[8]

11. Figure I shows the estimated organizational structure of the Executive Office, including the reporting lines of units funded from the regular budget as well as key extra-budgetary units and initiatives that are integrated into the core structure.

Figure I
Organizational structure of the Executive Office, 2016



Source: Executive Office data, OIOS interviews and analysis.

12. The internal composition of the Executive Office has changed over time. Regular budget units have been established, abolished, redeployed and repurposed, by approval of the General Assembly and at the request of the Secretary-General. The Executive Office has at times also housed additional elements outside of the Executive Office regular budget structure, formed to support particular initiatives of the Secretary-General: those active in 2016 are shown in figure II.[9] Recently, these elements have also included, but were not limited to, the following:

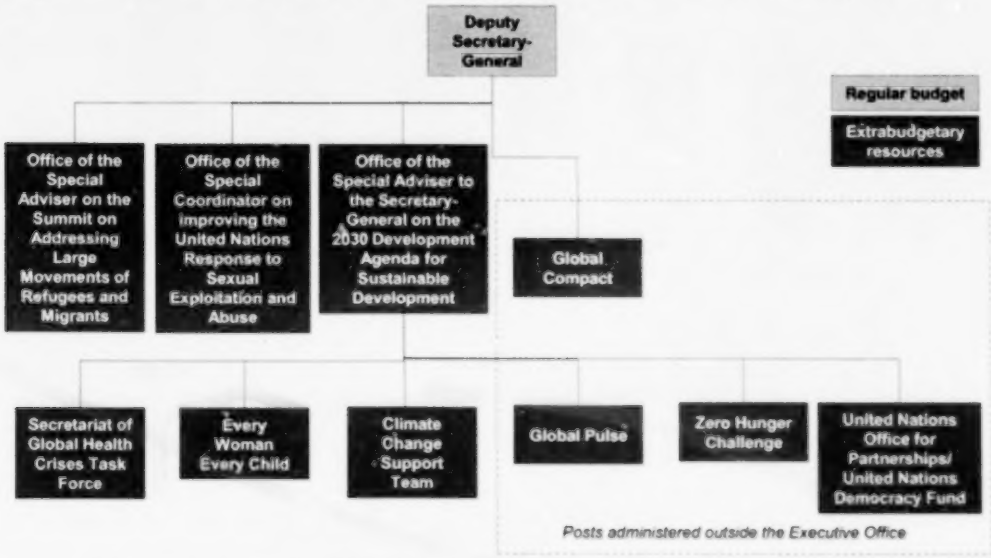
- Special Adviser on the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants (2016);
- Special Coordinator on Improving United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2015-present);

[8] Analysis of organizational structures of the Executive Office from: A/54/6 (sect. 1), A/56/6 (sect. 1), A/58/6 (sect. 1), A/60/6 (sect. 1), A/62/6 (sect. 1), A/64/6 (sect. 1), A/66/6 (sect. 1), A/68/6 (sect. 1), A/70/6 (sect. 1).

[9] These time-bound appointments are not within the regular budget structure, but operate from within the Executive Office.

- Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016-present);[10]
- Change Management Team (2011-2012);
- Partnerships Team (2012-2015).

Figure II
Organizational structure of the Executive Office: special advisers and initiatives, 2016


Deputy Secretary-General
Regular budget
Extrabudgetary resources
Office of the Special Adviser on the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants
Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the 2030 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development
Global Compact
Secretariat of Global Health Crises Task Force
Every Woman Every Child
Climate Change Support Team
Global Pulse
Zero Hunger Challenge
United Nations Office for Partnerships/ United Nations Democracy Fund
Posts administered outside the Executive Office

Source: Executive Office data, OIOS interviews and analysis.

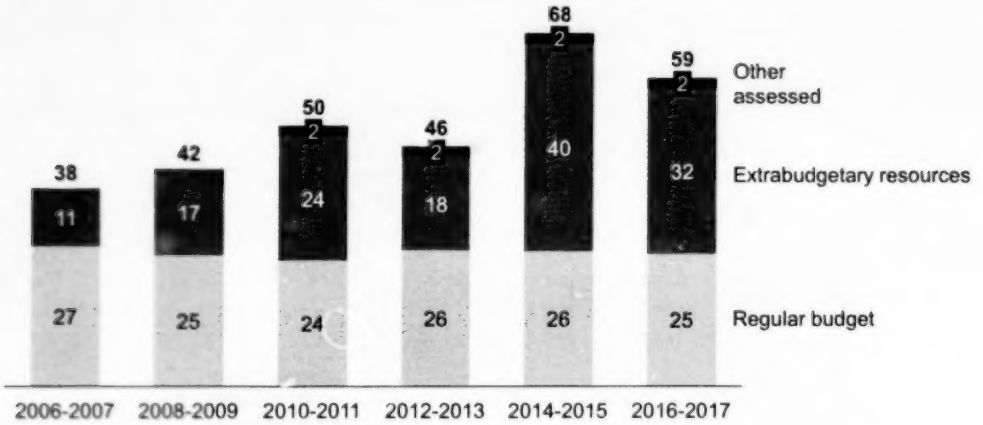
13. The Spokesperson, housed in the Department of Public Information, the Chief of Protocol of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, and their deputies also reported directly to the Chef de Cabinet, in addition to their respective heads of department. The heads of all United Nations Secretariat departments, funds, programmes and agencies reported to the Secretary-General through the Chef de Cabinet or the Deputy Secretary-General.

Resources

14. Figure III shows Executive Office appropriation by funding source. Executive Office appropriations grew between 2006 and 2017 at an average rate of 9 per cent per biennium. This was driven exclusively by increases in extrabudgetary funding, which peaked in 2014-2015 at 59 per cent of the total budget.

[10] The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also manages: Every Woman Every Child, Zero Hunger Challenge and Global Pulse (SG/A/1616*-BIO/4794*-ENV/DEV/1607). Other special initiatives have originated within the Executive Office, but have since ended or migrated to stand-alone office structures or other United Nations entities.

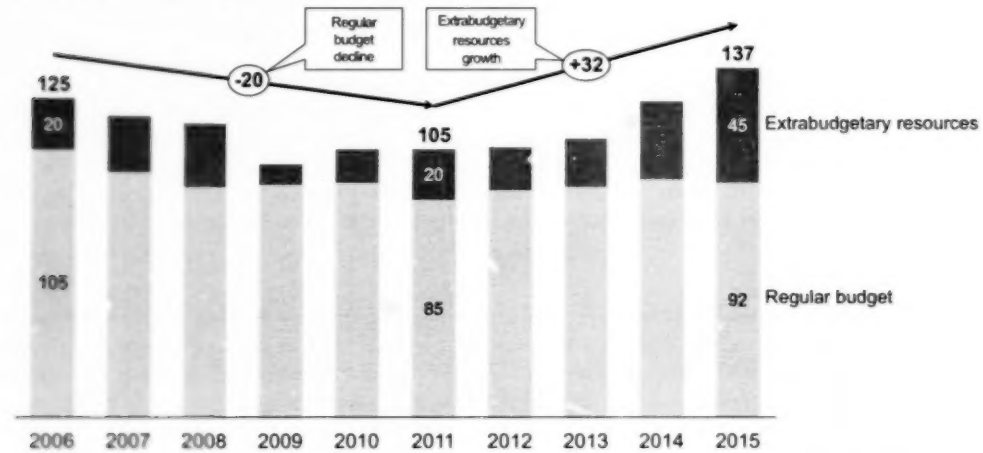
Figure III
Executive Office: appropriation, 2006-2017
(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: Executive Office, proposed programme budgets.

15. Figure IV shows Executive Office posts over time. While total posts declined from 125 in 2006 to 105 in 2011, the five years to 2105 saw an increase to 137. This was driven by extra-budgetary-funded posts largely associated with special initiatives; in contrast, regular budget posts fell from 105 to 92 over the period.

Figure IV
Posts administered by the Executive Office, 2006-2015*



Source: Post incumbency reports of the Executive Office, Executive Office data, OIOS analysis.

* Includes loans. Excludes vacant posts and those administered outside the Executive Office (Global Pulse, Global Compact, Zero Hunger Challenge, United Nations Office for Partnerships/United Nations Democracy Fund).

III. Methodology

16. All evaluation results are based on a triangulation of multiple data sources. The following combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed in the evaluation:

- **Interviews**: semi-structured interviews with 41 current and former Executive Office staff and representatives of 12 key United Nations system partners and 6 Member States
- **Surveys**: web-based survey of all current Executive Office staff,[11] United Nations entity heads and key staff,[12] and all Permanent Representatives of Member States[13]
- **Document and literature review**: structured content analysis of a selected sample of key documentation, including literature on context, organizational structure and effectiveness; previous reviews of the Executive Office; key meeting documentation, minutes and decisions; the history of the Executive Office; senior leadership schedules; and internal guidance materials
- **Secondary data analysis**: analysis of workload and overtime data; media statistics; Executive Office communications and scheduling data; budget data; and global risk indicators
- **Direct observation**: two weeks spent in the Executive Office, including direct observation of over 20 internal and external meetings
- **Analysis of the correspondence logs of the Executive Office**, including volume and routing by unit
- **Benchmarking**: review and comparison of structures and process in three comparable executive offices

17. The evaluation focused on the previous administration which ended in December 2016. The work of the Executive Office often depends on input from its reporting departments; however the evaluation scope was limited to an assessment of the Executive Office only.

18. Throughout the evaluation, OIOS consulted an expert advisory panel, consisting of three scholars of the United Nations and former Executive Office staff. OIOS also consulted the Executive Office during the conduct of the evaluation and expresses thanks for its cooperation and assistance. OIOS expresses particular appreciation for the openness with which the Executive Office shared information, and for welcoming OIOS staff to the Executive Office and meetings. The response of the Executive Office to the draft of the present report is contained in annex A.

[11] The staff survey was sent to all 127 staff of the Executive Office in August 2016. A total of 86 staff members responded (a 68 per cent response rate). Excluding special initiative staff, the response rate was 75 per cent.

[12] The United Nations system staff survey was sent to a non-random sample of 235 staff in 31 entities. A total of 85 staff members responded (a 36 per cent response rate).

[13] Owing to the low response rate from Permanent Representatives of Member States, OIOS did not use this survey data.

IV. Evaluation results

A. Direct support provided by the Executive Office to the Secretary-General has been generally effective, although with some efficiency costs related to travel and scheduling

19. In implementing its mandate, the Executive Office has been particularly effective in performing its functions of direct servicing and support to the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General himself indicated that the Executive Office set-up and direct support to him had been working well, and 69 per cent of current Executive Office staff interviewed also viewed the office as fully meeting its mandate overall; all believed that the Office was particularly effective in its direct servicing of the Secretary-General. The remaining respondents provided a more mixed assessment.

20. More detailed analyses indicate that the Executive Office had been effective across its core direct servicing functions, which consisted primarily of:

- Correspondence handling
- Scheduling and trip planning
- Production and review of briefing notes and talking points
- Speechwriting and communications

21. The Executive Office generally enabled the Secretary-General to respond promptly to scheduling requests, remain well-informed, attend meetings well prepared, and release press statements quickly.

Correspondence handling

22. A primary servicing function of the Executive Office concerns the handling of the Secretary-General's correspondence, and the Executive Office performed well in this regard. For example, in 2015, all incoming correspondence was logged daily, with relevant items brought to the Secretary-General's attention by means of regular itemized lists. Items requiring action were tasked on the day of receipt. Analysis of tracking data for 2015 revealed that 50 per cent of the tasked items were indicated as complete within a week and 80 per cent within a month.

23. On the basis of their overall communications with the Executive Office, United Nations system staff surveyed almost unanimously assessed the responsiveness of the Executive Office positively (43 per cent rated the Executive Office as very responsive, and 55 per cent rated it as somewhat responsive). Member States interviewed also reported that the Executive Office was very responsive. However, the Central Records Unit's routing and tasking protocol for incoming items was last updated in 2012 and, since then, multiple new units have been formed within the Executive Office, creating some uncertainty as to which units should be tasked with handling which correspondence. Some Executive Office staff interviewed noted excessive layers in the review processes for outgoing letters of the Secretary-General.

Scheduling and trip planning

24. The Executive Office has also been effective in helping prepare for and execute the Secretary-General's engagements. In close collaboration with relevant departments and the rest of the Executive Office, the Scheduling Office of the Secretary-General coordinated the Secretary-General's engagements, which averaged 3,400 per year from 2006 to 2015. The Executive Office has also helped plan and organize over 50 trips per year, with detailed programmes, meeting the Secretary-General's requirements for substantive and ceremonial protocol support. Fifty-eight per cent of Executive Office staff surveyed rated the effectiveness of scheduling processes as good or excellent, compared with 10 per cent who rated them as poor or very poor.[14]

Production and review of briefing notes and talking points

25. The Executive Office has been generally successful in its preparation of briefing notes and talking points. To help the Secretary-General prepare for his engagements, the Executive Office reviewed an estimated 3,300 briefing notes and talking points in 2016. The Executive Office typically tasked briefing notes and talking points to departments within a day, and gave them a few days to submit drafts. An average of four Executive Office staff then reviewed drafts to help align messaging, adapt the tone and reduce errors.

26. As a result of greater advance notice and guidance given to departments in recent years, the quality of briefing notes and talking points has improved. More than half (54 per cent) of United Nations System staff surveyed rated the process as good or excellent overall (as opposed to 5 per cent rating it poor or very poor).[15] The majority of Executive Office staff also rated the effectiveness (62 per cent) and efficiency (68 per cent) of the briefing notes and talking point process as good or excellent (versus 8 per cent saying it was poor or very poor).[16] Nevertheless, some staff noted in interviews that the process could have been further improved by streamlining the review of briefing notes and talking points within the Executive Office, especially for materials related to development issues, which were reportedly checked by approximately seven different Executive Office staff members on average.

Speechwriting and communications

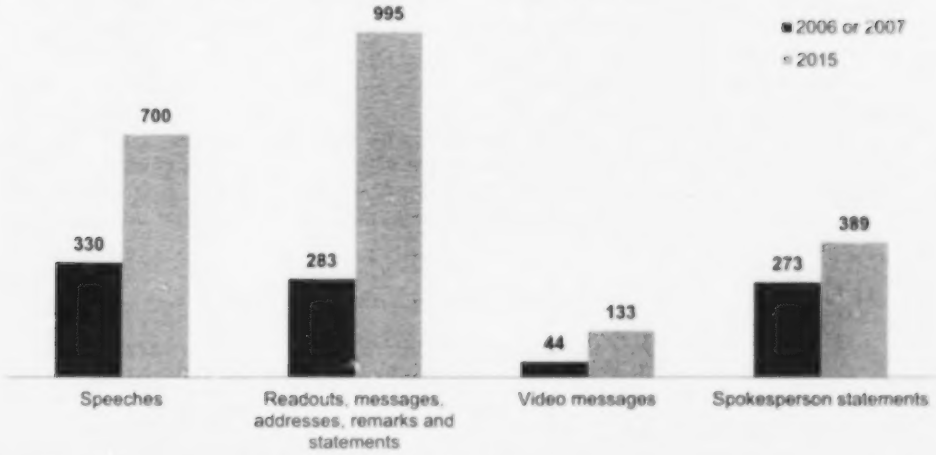
27. The Executive Office has also worked effectively to draft and review an increasing volume of communications outputs, which more than doubled between 2006 and 2015. The increase indicated an improved ability to be nimble and act quickly to respond to events having an impact on the organization.

[14] The scheduling processes were rated as "fair" by 32 per cent of staff.

[15] The process was rated as "fair" by 50 per cent of United Nations system staff.

[16] The effectiveness of briefing notes and talking points was rated as "fair" by 31 per cent of staff and their efficiency was rated as "fair" by 24 per cent.

Figure V
Communication outputs of the Secretary-General, 2006-2015



Source: Executive Office and Department of Public Information data.

28. The Executive Office was able to meet these increasing requirements through a 50 per cent increase in personnel in the Communications and Speechwriting Unit of the Executive Office from 2006/07 to 2016/17. Some key staff interviewed suggested, however, that a more selective and strategic approach to communications, including better linkages to scheduling and planning, would have further improved the effectiveness of Executive Office-supported communications. In particular, providing more lead time to produce outputs would have enabled a more proactive approach to determining the Secretary-General's key messages for priority issues.

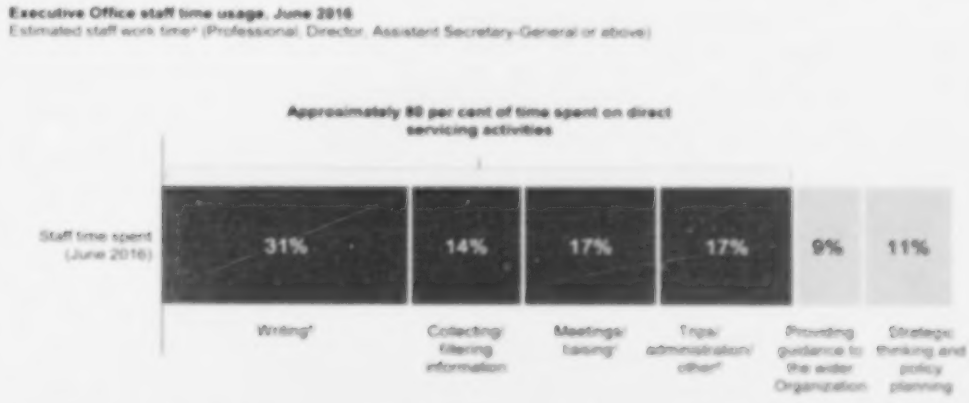
Some inefficiencies in the servicing processes of the Executive Office

29. While servicing of the Secretary-General has been generally effective, there were inefficiencies in some Executive Office processes, particularly with regard to the disruptive and unsustainable travel processes. The Secretary-General travelled from 114 to 162 days every year between 2007 and 2016 and, in the absence of a dedicated trip coordination unit, travel arrangements were overseen by the Scheduling Office of the Secretary-General. To spread some of this significant workload beyond the staff of the Scheduling Office, the Executive Office used a "trip captain" rotation system, which typically required substantive officers to spend three to four weeks undertaking detailed trip planning, including substantive work on the programme as well as logistics and ceremonial protocol functions. Numerous Executive Office staff interviewed reported that these additional responsibilities could at times amount to a full-time job, owing partly to the level of detail involved in planning. Staff widely expressed dissatisfaction with the system, noting that it led to an inefficient use of substantive officer expertise and created significant disruptive gaps in the "home" unit.

30. The capacity of the Executive Office for advising on the best use of the Secretary-General's time was overstretched, resulting in limited prioritization. The Secretary-General's calendar was generally set on daily cycles, with one annual trip planning process and limited mid-range or cross-sector advice on which engagements should be prioritized. The Director of the Scheduling Office of the Secretary-General had in recent years also acted as the Secretary-General's Special Assistant, and coordinated ceremonial protocol for most trips.[11] The accumulation of roles enabled efficient scheduling, but left the Scheduling Office overstretched by the challenges of both responding to scheduling requests and helping to execute a packed schedule of trips and events.

31. The amount of time needed for direct servicing of the Secretary-General has affected other functions in the Executive Office. For example, the Secretary-General himself noted that he did not have enough time for strategic thinking: as one indicator of this limitation, only 6 per cent of his schedule is typically allocated as being "private/blocked". As indicated in figure VI below, the focus of the Executive Office on preparing for and executing the growing external engagements of the Secretary-General was also reflected in the fact that Executive Office Professional and senior staff surveyed reported spending approximately 80 per cent of their time on direct servicing of the Secretary-General, in contrast with 9 per cent on providing guidance to the wider Organization.

Figure VI
The Executive Office is focused mainly on direct servicing of the Secretary-General



Source: Executive Office staff data, OIOS survey of Executive Office staff, 2016.

[a] Estimate based on survey time sample (n=40) of 49 core Executive Office Professional and higher staff.

[b] For the Secretary-General/Deputy Secretary-General/Chef de Cabinet and others.

[c] With internal/external interlocutors.

[d] Includes trip planning for the Secretary-General/Deputy Secretary-General/Chef de Cabinet, internal administration (scheduling, filing, human resources, budget, procurement, etc.), other.

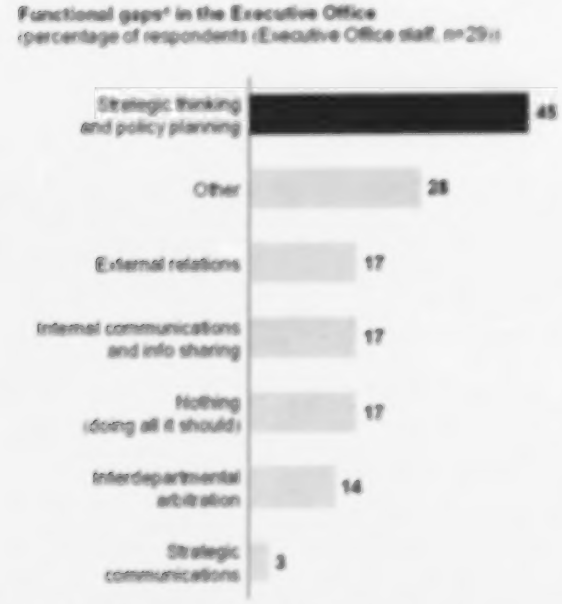
[11] Except high-level multilateral meetings, for which ceremonial protocol is coordinated by the Protocol and Liaison Unit of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, complementing the latter's role in accreditation of participating delegations.

B. Despite some capacity in specialized areas, dedicated capacity for cross-sectoral medium- and long-term policy planning has been insufficient

12. As evidenced by the work volume noted above, the Executive Office worked at a relentless pace in order to be responsive to the needs of the Secretary-General and the Organization in a timely manner. However, the intense workload required for the Office to be responsive has left insufficient time for critical reflection and planning. The unique cross-pillar vantage point of the Executive Office in advising the Secretary-General and leading the system towards addressing interconnected global challenges requires cross-sectoral medium- and long-term horizon scanning and policy planning, but these have been inadequate in the Office.

13. As shown in figure VII, strategic thinking and policy planning was by far the substantive gap most commonly mentioned by Executive Office staff interviewed, volunteered twice as often as any other. Twice as many staff also described the Office as more reactive as compared with those who described it as proactive. Executive Office staff at the professional level and above reported spending just 11 per cent of their time on strategic thinking and policy planning, which challenged the Office's ability to meet its mandate for executive direction and coordination, and its capacity to support the Secretary-General to propose well-prepared options to Member States for decision.

Figure VII
Functional gaps in the Executive Office, according to staff of the Office



Source: OIOS interviews and analysis.

[a] "Is the Executive Office not doing anything it should be doing?"

94. The [illegible] longer-term planning capacities of the Executive Office have declined over time. From 1997 to 2012, a small Strategic Planning Unit was set up in the Executive Office to scan the global horizon and inform the Secretary-General of anticipated challenges and opportunities. Although it did not always fully fulfil those functions, key current and former Executive Office staff noted that the Unit was most successful when it was overseen by a well-qualified Assistant Secretary-General, had direct and regular access to the Secretary-General and had strong linkages with relevant Executive Office units, in particular communications and scheduling. In 2012, following the reassignment of the Assistant Secretary-General, the Unit became a Policy Planning Unit led by a Director and reporting to the Deputy Secretary-General. Policy Planning Unit staff reported lacking the authority and senior-level access needed to effectively fulfil their strategic thinking and policy planning functions as envisaged.

95. Short-term strategic thinking, however, as well as engagement with Secretariat and other United Nations system entities on strategic issues, has occurred on an ongoing basis throughout the Executive Office. There has also been some capacity — although fragmented — for longer-term policy planning at the unit level in the Executive Office. This included the regional quarterly reviews, which were established through the Human Rights Up Front initiative to cover crises with regional dimensions; the analysis and planning capacity in the Political Unit focused on peace operations; the Secretary-General's special advisers; and various special initiatives and task forces.

96. In particular, regional quarterly reviews on each region were convened to share analysis and assess early warning and agree on preventive and responsive measures.[18] These were serviced by the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre. Document review and direct observation of review meetings confirmed that the reviews filled a gap in cross-sectoral, working-level horizon scanning, and an internal survey after the first year of the review showed that most participants believed it improved the system's early warning and action mechanism, although room for improvement remained with regard to decision follow-up.[19] The review structure also does not cover interregional crises. The United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre, which was previously the Situation Centre of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, remained focused on peace and security situational awareness rather than horizon scanning, and reported receiving little direction from the Executive Office on analysis priorities, despite reporting directly to the Executive Office since 2013.

97. The analysis and planning capacity in the Executive Office Political Unit was established in December 2015, following the findings of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on critical gaps in the planning capacity of the Executive Office. In a memo describing the establishment of a planning cell, the Secretary-General identified priority areas for analysis and planning, including supporting political progress, responding quickly to deteriorating situations, delivering on transitions and responding to new challenges. The cell was tasked to support joint analysis and integrated assessments and planning, as well as issue

[18] Regional quarterly review concept note, 2015.
[19] Regional quarterly review survey summary, 2014.

planning directives, in areas relating to peace and security. It has largely filled the planning gap in the Executive Office in this sector.

38. Staff also identified special initiatives, discussed in result E below, as areas in which longer-term strategic thinking on development issues took place. Staff in the offices of special advisers or special initiatives who were surveyed reported higher than average percentages of time spent on strategic thinking and policy planning and the topics covered by these units, such as climate change and development, were intrinsically longer-term issues.

39. Given that capacities in the rest of the United Nations system are focused on sectoral, departmental mandates, rather than holistic system response, the lack of an Executive Office unit to pull together analyses from across the system has led to an absence of mid- and long-range, cross-sector strategic thinking and policy planning at the global level to identify emerging issues or potential crises. There has also been no systematic follow-up on what the Secretary-General described as "frozen crises" — those which have disappeared from the news headlines but remain critical from a conflict prevention standpoint. Finally, some representatives of Member States and the Executive Office staff interviewed noted an absence of systematic readouts and syntheses of intergovernmental processes, to which the Executive Office can lead the formulation of responses.

C. Decision-making support provided by the Executive Office has enabled the Secretary-General to be responsive to crises, but has coincided with a decline in formal, collective decision-making mechanisms

40. In fulfilling its mandate in executive direction and management, the Executive Office played a critical role in supporting the Secretary-General's decisions on key challenges facing the Organization. It did this by using its cross-pillar convening power to organize and advise a range of decision-making mechanisms, including the Policy Committee, the Senior Action Group, the Management Committee, steering groups formed to address specific crises and smaller ad hoc meetings with key principals.

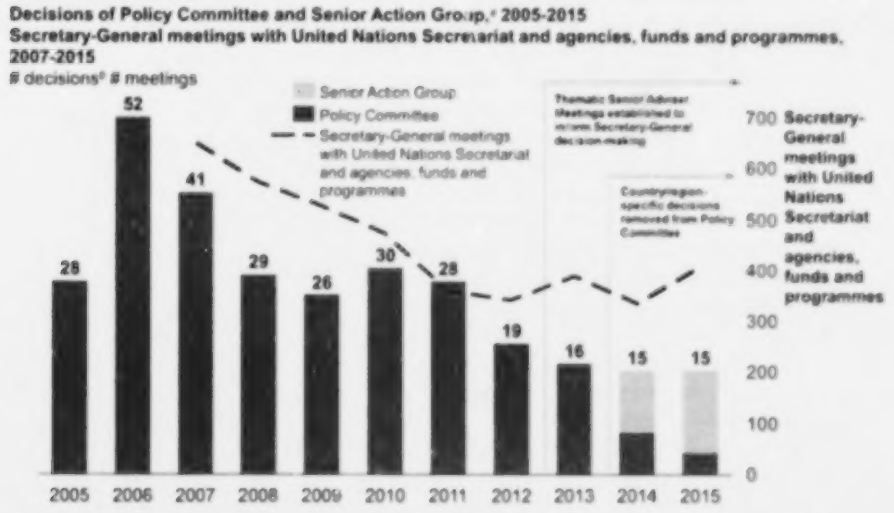
41. On non-management decisions, the Executive Office has been the secretariat for two formal mechanisms — the Policy Committee and the Senior Action Group. Until recently, the Committee was the primary vehicle for collective decision-making on substantive issues in the Executive Office. Established in 2005 and chaired by the Secretary-General, it was initially managed by the Assistant Secretary-General of the Strategic Planning Unit. This configuration allowed for high-level-led cabinet decisions on both regional and thematic topics, and was described by former and current staff involved as effective in collecting system views, facilitating debates and resulting in informed decisions as well as giving policy direction to the system. A key former staff member highlighted its role in facilitating multi-stakeholder debates and decision-making that was better informed and more strategic than previously.

42. As seen in figure VIII below, the number of Policy Committee decisions has generally declined since 2006 for several reasons. First, Committee meetings came

to be perceived as "rubber stamp" exercises, where an overemphasis on consensus led to pre-determined recommendations and less debate. Second, heavy six-to-eight-week preparation processes involving 16-page input papers negatively affected timeliness. Lastly, in 2012 the Committee secretariat shifted from Assistant Secretary-General to Director level. In 2014 the Secretary-General issued a letter acknowledging perceptions that the long preparation process of the Committee was not optimal for the "time sensitive and emergency-driven nature" of challenges facing the Organization, and removed most country and region-specific decisions from the Committee.

43. Also in 2014, the Senior Action Group was formed, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, which in part filled the gap left by the decline in Policy Committee decisions. It assembled principals of key departments and agencies to discuss specific country situations and embraced a cross-pillar approach to preventing and addressing human rights challenges. The Group involved a shorter two-week preparation process with two-page input papers, and allowed for greater potential for interactive discussion during meetings. Several Executive Office staff interviewed highlighted the Group as effective and direct observation of several meetings of the Group confirmed their cabinet-style and action-oriented nature. While the Group has facilitated collective decision-making on country and region-specific issues, three factors were identified as detracting from its effectiveness: it was not chaired by the Secretary-General, it lacked a Secretary-General's Bulletin, and it had insufficient follow-up procedures.

Figure VIII
Policy Committee decisions have declined in the past 10 years



Source: Archive of the Policy Committee of the Executive Office; Senior Action Group of the Executive Office; recommendations tracking database; Scheduling Office of the Secretary-General data; OIOS analysis.

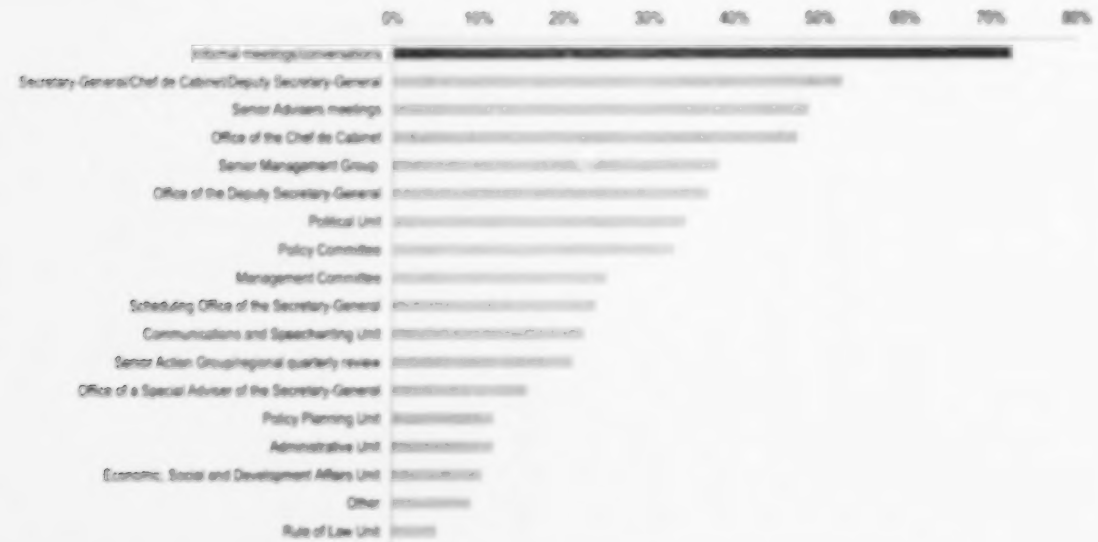
[a] Includes country/region-specific and thematic issues. Excludes management committee.

[b] "Decisions" defined as sets of actionable recommendations for United Nations entities involving extensive external engagement.

44. Management decisions have been largely covered within the third decision-making mechanism — the Management Committee — which was established in 2005 and was chaired by the Chef de Cabinet. For each agenda item focusing on a strategic management issue, a lead department was assigned to develop proposals for consideration before the meeting, which were then debated and decided upon during the meeting, with systematic follow-up. This committee has issued 52 signed decision memos since 2008.

45. While the Executive Office-supported decisions that took place within the formalized collective mechanisms described above have declined overall, decisions in smaller or more ad hoc processes did occur at high frequency. On the one hand, this approach appropriately allowed for nimbler responses to crises and targeted follow-up on decisions with relevant selected actors. On the other hand, it potentially reduced the number of decisions made and action taken based on longer-range agenda items as well as on the cross-sectoral consultations that the Executive Office is uniquely positioned to facilitate. This shift is reflected in the fact that United Nations system staff surveyed noted that they most frequently escalated decisions to the Executive Office through informal channels or directly through individual Executive Office units, rather than through formal collective mechanisms, as indicated in figure IX below.

Figure IX
Where United Nations system staff escalate "highly important"* decisions in the Executive Office



* Defined as "those with significant expected consequences for the attainment of the Organization's goals over the 1-2 years following the decision".

Source: OIOS survey of United Nations System staff, August 2016.

46. The United Nations system staff surveyed were divided with respect to how often the Executive Office invited diverse perspectives, and sent well-specified questions to guide contributions on decisions; for both issues, 36 per cent said this happened most of the time or always, while 27 per cent reported that the Executive Office rarely or never did so. Some stakeholders interviewed indicated shortcomings in Executive Office tasking of departments, obtaining their buy-in and ensuring accountability for implementation — perhaps the key risk of the shifting balance towards fewer formalized collective decision processes.

47. The Executive Office also supported weekly information-sharing senior adviser meetings, which resulted in a schedule of over 100 senior leadership meetings convened by the Executive Office (of which the Secretary-General chaired 65) per year. Analysis of meeting schedules over six months of 2016 indicates that one third of these meetings were focused on decision-making and the remaining two thirds were primarily for information sharing. Senior adviser meetings provided the benefit of face time between system heads and the Secretary-General; however, they have been time-consuming and most Executive Office and senior United Nations system staff attendees interviewed questioned their value at these volumes. Direct observation by OIOS of several senior meetings corroborated the overall information-sharing nature of the meetings, although there was evidence that meeting discussions would be used to inform decisions made in smaller groups afterwards. Nevertheless, many the Executive Office and some system staff indicated that the high ratio of information sharing meetings supported by the Executive Office might not always have been the most efficient use of valuable and limited senior leader time.

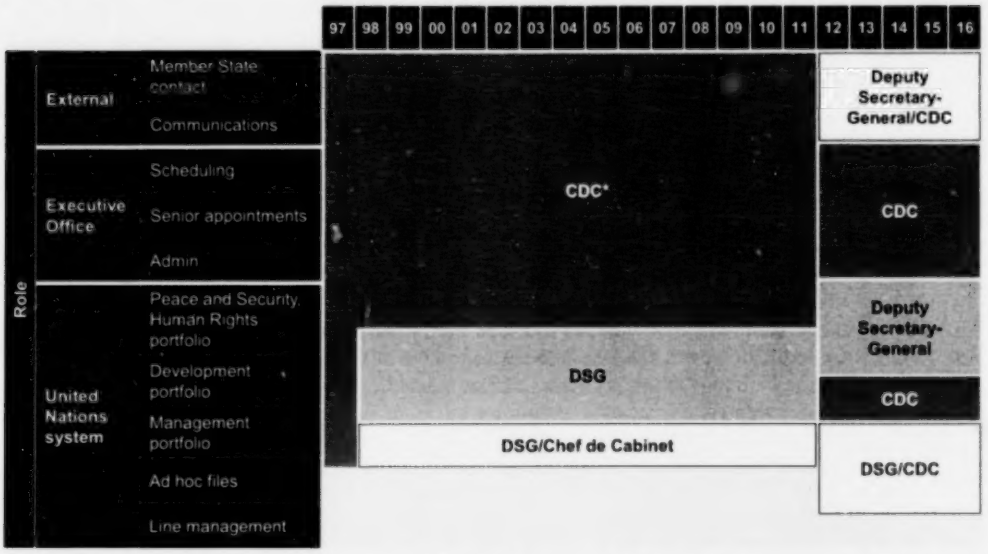
D. Shifts and overlaps between the responsibilities of the Deputy Secretary-General and the Chef de Cabinet have led to risks for the functioning of the Executive Office

48. In addition to the Secretary-General, the Executive Office structure and functions hinge around the Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet roles and how they relate to one another. One staff member noted a common view that, "if you get the Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet relationship right, everything else falls into place". The Deputy Secretary-General position was established in 1998 to assist the Secretary-General in managing the operations of the Secretariat, to act for the Secretary-General in his or her absence, and to support the Secretary-General in the economic and social sphere.[20] The Chef de Cabinet, who in principle is subordinate to the Deputy Secretary-General, heads the Executive Office and assists the Secretary-General, as well as the Deputy Secretary-General, in their functions. Although this division was followed at first, in practice the Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet portfolios have been allocated in two main ways — indicated in figure X below — largely determined by individual competencies and relationships.

[20] See General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

Figure X

Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet roles have been defined in two main ways



Source: Executive Office, proposed programme budgets, Executive Office data, OIOS interviews and analysis.

* The Deputy Secretary-General supervised communications from 2004 to 2005.

49. This shift in responsibilities has had mixed implications with respect to how the Executive Office functioned. From 2012 to 2016, for example, the Deputy Secretary-General took on the political portfolio while the Chef de Cabinet handled management. This had some benefits, including playing to the strengths of the individuals in those positions and uniting all of the three pillars under the Deputy Secretary-General's leadership. Yet it also created risks of duplication between the Deputy Secretary-General and the Secretary-General, as well as between the Deputy Secretary-General and the Chef de Cabinet, who had always been the main point of contact for Permanent Representatives of Member States — an inherently political role. Such duplication also contributed to tensions in some cases. In 2012, for example, overlapping claims arose as to whether the Chef de Cabinet or Deputy Secretary-General should clear statements of the Secretary-General. A compromise emerged whereby both would have full authority to do so (communicated to the Executive Office staff via town hall meetings and a jointly signed note circulated in July 2012), thereby adding review layers. Several key staff described the Executive Office during this period as an office "siloed" along Deputy Secretary-General/Chef de Cabinet lines, which impeded information flows. Lastly, with shifts in roles, stakeholder expectations were also more challenging to manage, as some external stakeholders noted confusion regarding to whom issues should be referred.

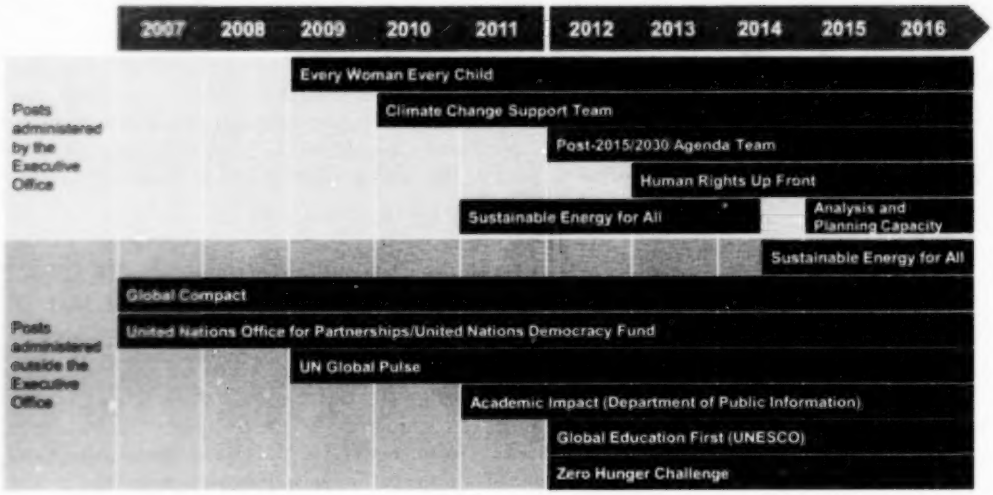
50. The Executive Office staff interviewed were divided on whether the most recent configuration worked well or not, and a number cited personalities as the primary driver of the relationship. Some staff interviewed reported that silos still

lingered under each, and that there was a risk that hybrid issues fell between them. Furthermore, 42 per cent of department staff surveyed reported delays in the arbitration by the Executive Office of interdepartmental disagreements — a function suited to the Deputy Secretary-General given the more senior position of the role — and more than half the Executive Office staff interviewed concurred with this assessment. Three fourths of Executive Office staff did not agree with the recommendation for two Deputy Secretaries-General, as made in the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, with many citing potential additional layers and silos as reasons for caution when thinking about introducing additional Deputy Secretaries-General.

E. Placement of the Secretary-General's special initiatives in the Executive Office has helped to spur action on key priorities, but has also led to concerns about duplication between the Executive Office and other parts of the United Nations system

51. From 2009 to 2016, several special initiatives of the Secretary-General, such as Zero Hunger Challenge and Every Woman Every Child, were placed within the Executive Office. Their placement in the office gave greater visibility to the Secretary-General's key priorities, and also helped mobilize action, enhanced coordination and increased financial and non-financial commitments for these priority issues. For example, the Climate Change and 2030 Agenda teams housed in the Executive Office have shepherded complex processes leading to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2016. Every Woman Every Child has raised commitments from over 300 stakeholders since its inception in 2009. Furthermore, key internal and external stakeholders (including senior leadership in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) involved in Human Rights Up Front noted that its success was attributable in large part to its placement in the Executive Office, which gave it the leverage needed to catalyse changes in system-wide thinking and culture in relation to human rights.

Figure XI
Initiatives of the Executive Office and "satellite units", 2007-2016



Source: Reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, Executive Office data, desk research, OIOS interviews and analysis.

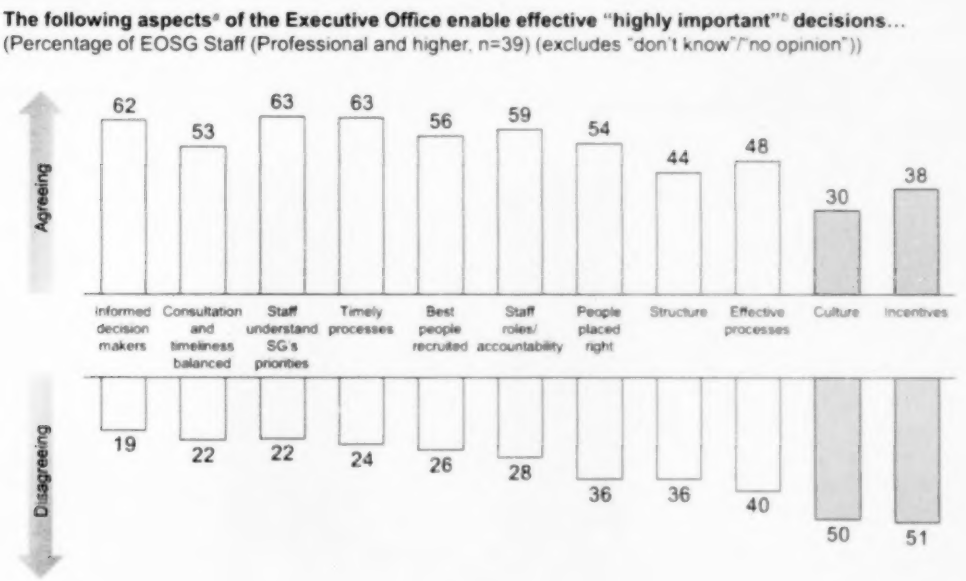
52. These successes were also reflected in the fact that the majority of staff surveyed in other United Nations system entities rated Executive Office coordination in relation to two initiative areas — climate change (76 per cent) and sustainable development (64 per cent) — as "good" or "excellent" over the past three to five years; these were the highest out of 13 topical areas surveyed.

53. However, the placement of special initiatives within the Executive Office also resulted in a significantly larger office size, contributing to some of the concerns noted in result F below. Several Executive Office staff interviewed suggested removing the units concerned from the office. Although the initiatives were intended for advocacy rather than operational functions, 42 per cent of United Nations system staff surveyed raised concerns about overlap; among development entity staff specifically, this proportion increased to 67 per cent. One United Nations system staff member expressed this common concern by noting "a serious concern with the Executive Office duplicating efforts in a variety of ways ... without consultation, and with a lack of clarity." Several key Executive Office staff suggested that an "incubation period," during which special initiatives were launched within the Executive Office but then spun off to departments on a pre-defined timetable, could have addressed duplication concerns while preserving the benefits of the Secretary-General's imprimatur.

F. The Executive Office has benefited from high-calibre and hard-working staff but has faced challenges in information sharing and cross-pillar collaboration within the Office

54. The hard-working and high-calibre staff of the Executive Office have understood and serviced the Secretary-General's priorities well. However, staff interviewed indicated a need to enhance their intra-office collaboration to better harness the full potential of the Executive Office and enhance effective internal decision-making, creative thinking and "cross-pillar fertilization". With regard to decision-making, half the staff surveyed did not believe that the Executive Office culture or incentives enabled effective decisions. These two factors were rated the worst among 11 decision enablers, as shown in figure XII below. Some staff interviewed noted an emphasis in the office on consensus versus open debate on options.

Figure XII
Incentives and culture rated as main weaknesses in the decision environment of the Executive Office



Source: OIOS survey of the Executive Office staff, 2016.

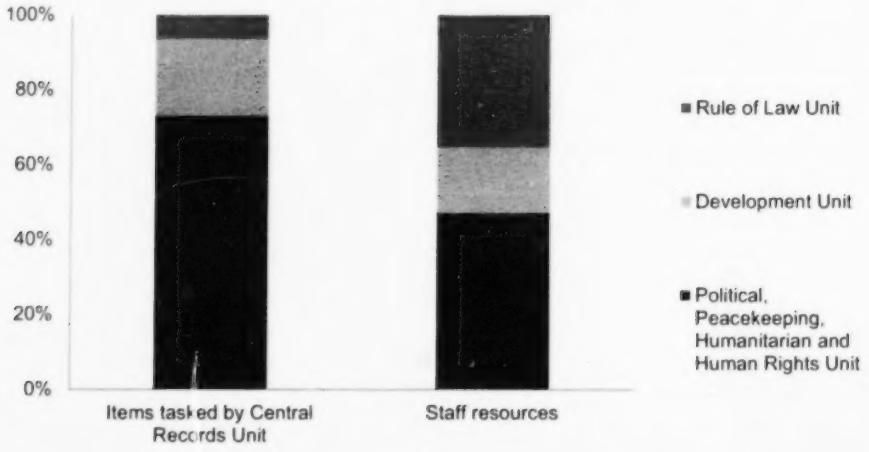
[a] "Thinking about the Executive Office as a whole, please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements [regarding various aspects of Executive Office decisions processes surrounding 'highly important' decisions]".

[b] Defined as "decisions about issues with significant consequences for the attainment of the Organization's goals over the next 1-2 years".

55. The sheer size of the Executive Office, which grew as a result of extrabudgetary-funded posts largely connected to special initiatives, also made it difficult for staff to connect and share information. When asked about improvements to office structure, one third of staff interviewed pointed to the large office size and/or existence of silos as problematic. Although unit heads met daily, there had been no regular all-staff meetings or regular staff retreats in recent years and limited options for self-reflection. Staff also reported limited work processes to facilitate cross-pillar collaboration and the need to improve information sharing across units. One effect of this "siloing" is that, although over two thirds of all staff reported that they understood their own roles well, one quarter believed that their roles were not clearly understood by their colleagues within the Executive Office.

56. About one third of the Executive Office staff suggested in interviews that some units or special initiatives could be merged or removed. One example is the Rule of Law Unit, established in response to Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and which covers some areas that overlap not only with the Political Unit but also with other parts of the United Nations System such as the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Rule of Law Unit also received significantly fewer incoming correspondence action items from the Central Records Unit than other Executive Office units, despite having similar staff levels (see figure XIII).

Figure XIII
Correspondence tasking and staff levels per unit, 2016



V. Conclusion

57. Its system-wide view and unparalleled convening power give the Executive Office of the Secretary-General a unique ability to alert the Secretary-General to interconnected global risks, pull together cross-sector analysis and options, and galvanise implementation. To do this, however, cross-sector medium- and long-term

policy planning is essential, and dedicated capacity for this has declined and been inadequate. A more balanced mix of servicing decision-making approaches would also give the Secretary-General and the Organization more opportunities to set strategic agendas, debate comprehensive options and successfully implement decisions. These changes would enable the Executive Office to more effectively harness the capacities of the United Nations system to plan for and respond to complex global challenges.

58. A strong asset of the Executive Office has been its hard-working and high-calibre staff, who have been deeply invested in the success of the Secretary-General and the Organization as a whole. Ensuring that these staff are used in ways which harness their strengths and contribute to strong organizational leadership is critical. The tone is set from the top, including having a Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet with clearly delineated responsibilities and the right competencies to meet those responsibilities. Adopting a more strategic approach to prioritizing senior leader and staff time will free up opportunities to address gaps and fully capitalize on the central position of the Executive Office in the system.

59. The first few months of a new Secretary-General's term — when goodwill and receptivity by the global community are combined with high expectations with respect to how he will lead the Organization in preventing and responding to global challenges — represent a significant opportunity for change. It is a critical period for establishing strong relationships with Member States and the Organization, define leadership styles and set up a supporting executive office which helps to meet those expectations. OIOS presented preliminary findings in November 2016 to the transition team of the Secretary-General, which has already taken steps to address some of the issues identified in the present report. These include:

- The formation of an Executive Committee for senior-level decision-making
- The establishment of two new senior positions: the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination and the Senior Adviser on Policy
- The reversion of the functions of the Deputy Secretary-General to those set out in General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

60. Given these and other actions taken by the current Secretary-General which address the main results of this evaluation, OIOS makes no further recommendations at present.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2017

Annex

Formal comments provided by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General

The Inspection and Evaluation Division presents below the full text of comments received from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General on the Evaluation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

Note to Ms. Mendoza

Response to OIOS Report on Programme Evaluation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General

1. I thank you for your Note dated 26 January 2017, in which you transmitted for review and comments the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Programme Evaluation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

2. As noted in the report, OIOS presented preliminary findings of the evaluation to the transition team of the Secretary-General in November 2016. Those findings were broadly in line with the direction of the discussions in the transition team on the restructuring of the Executive Office and its working methods. As spelled out in the report, the Secretary-General has established, on his first day in office, an Executive Committee for senior-level decision-making in the Secretariat; and two senior positions — the Senior Adviser on Policy and the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination. The Secretary-General also decided to revise the functions of the Deputy Secretary-General to be more closely aligned with those outlined in General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

3. With the implementation of these decisions, the Executive Office will be better equipped to support the Secretary-General in his substantive and administrative functions and in the executive direction of the Organization.

4. I would like to thank OIOS for this report, and I transmit herewith a few editorial comments to be considered when finalizing the report.

(*Signed*) Maria Luiza **Ribeiro Viotti**
6 February 2017